A Death Sonata

Spiro Markou

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Contents

The Indiscreet Passenger (1st Movement).....5
Baby in the Stroller (2nd Movement).....20
Recognition in the Light of Morning (3rd Movement).....39

The Indiscreet Passenger

I

Being of the great ancestral commercial houses, the elite passengers belong here in the first-class section of the airplane flying over the Atlantic to New York. Her husband George Brown and she herself Martha Brown, not being of the great ancestral commercial houses, do not belong here. Besides that, her husband is being, she knows, to say the least, a positive bother to the elite passengers.

George has never been discreet, but at times the opposite, so very clumsy and showy, particularly before the elite, just as now before the elite passengers. He has, though neither clumsily nor in a showy way of his own accord, reduced the distance between him and them, melted their icy reserve and aloofness till they cannot help but notice him, his presence, his, to them, utterly anomalous presence here with them in the first-class section of the airplane. Regardless, they have not said anything about him to her or any of the stewardesses. In fact she has not heard them speak at all, not even among themselves.

But should the elite passengers not speak a word about her husband George to her? Is that not the proper thing to do? The decent? Then again, she prefers that they have not, and also hopes that they will not speak a word about George to her, not a single solitary word–now, now speak a word about George, her good

decent man George to her? Why now and not in the past? Why have the elite in the past never spoken to her a word, some word, if only in passing, about his fair success, if not about his decency, his goodness–though of which she doubts whether they even know the meaning, being the expressionless and senseless blocks of ice they so much are–when she could have then let him know?

She has never said anything to her husband George about his behavior before the elite, much less about, beneath it, his deep need to be acknowledged by them, if only superficially. Such as when he and she in their car, always a little dusty and muddy, notwithstanding that they use it only off the farm, and the elite in their spotless chauffeur-driven limousines get caught abreast one another in traffic somewhere in the city, he always revving the engine and looking into the dark-tinted rear windows trying to see them and make eye contact with them, and not too infrequently even honking the horn, and the elite themselves always completely ignoring him of course. Then when the traffic opens, the elite just move on in their spotless chauffeur-driven limousines, not only with absolute disregard of her husband George but as if completely alone on the street in the traffic, as if the street were exclusively their own, some private drive on one of their own totally secluded estates.

Martha Brown sees that as each minute passes the elite passengers more and more notice her husband George and, what is more, are becoming more and more disconcerted by him. All their perfect reserve and aloofness are now not quite perfect; they

are now showing that they notice her husband George's, to them, indiscreet presence here in the first-class section.

She sees that the several stewardesses are busy serving drinks to the elite passengers. She also sees how when the elite passengers pass by her husband on their way out of the first-class section, they try not to look at him and in fact, it seems to her, do not. But their very attempt not to look at him, be it successful or not, belies the fact that they do notice him, that they are aware of him and his, to them, indiscreet presence and its stark and unambiguous intrusion into their usually distant and totally secluded lives. She herself really could not care less. This one time the elite, at least those of them here in the first-class section, will just have to put up with George, her good decent man George. Anyway, they will have to do so only till the airplane reaches New York, now only four hours or so more.

And as George himself at times says in fairly similar situations, when somewhere or other frequented by the elite, if not, as here, virtually exclusively reserved for them, he and she have paid their way, and with the sweat of their brows at that, consequently possess the right and deserve to be here in the first-class section to the same degree as the elite themselves.

II

George Brown's fellow passengers in the first-class section of the airplane flying over the Atlantic to New York are not used to not

having everything precisely as they wish. One of their foremost wishes is not to see the vulgar, not to have any contact whatsoever with the vulgar. A wish they never need to express, not even to themselves; there is in their lives, with all their unfathomable wealth, and the virtually hermetic seclusion it permits and the vast distance creates, nearly no chance at all of it ever occurring, or even of a threat of it, except, that is, with workmen who attend to their estates. In fact George Brown's presence is, the elite passengers feel, just like that of some workman on their estates, with their stocky, hairy, sweaty bodies, their large, callused, dirty hands, their thick, rough, dusty clothes and their heavy, cloddy, muddy boots. And if one looks at him on the way out of the first-class section, there in the aisle seat–his wife, obviously lacking any sense of decorum, not thinking to change seats with him or, though it would probably not help matters much, what with him and his presence having already been noticed by them, cover him again with the blanket–with his burly, lumpy, dumpy body in his tacky, high-priced, brand-new suit, his huge, ham-like, misshapen hands, his dishevelled, greasy, poorly groomed hair and his blunt-featured, sun-burnt, wind-worn face, he is just like some workman on their estates.

The indiscreet passenger is simply so much there. Not at all of course like themselves, subtle and light, slender and exquisite. And, unlike him, they never slouch, regardless of circumstances, being against all form. With their unfathomable riches and, what in the present age amounts to, aristocratic blood, they deserve naught but the subtle and light, the slender and exquisite and

hence deserve not to be confronted by the vulgar–to be confronted by, to have thrust before their eyes and sensitivities the indiscreet, the extremely indiscreet passenger there, just there behind them slouching, dreadfully slouching in the aisle seat at the door of the first-class section. They cannot even leave the first-class section without being confronted by him in all his vulgarity, his vulgarity of, among countless other things, being so much there.

The elite passengers are becoming more and more unlike themselves. Though each and every one of them is slim and of elegant figure, they are feeling somewhat weighted and uncomfortable in their seats, not sitting so collected and upright, so correct, but beginning to slouch. In their perfectly tailored and tasteful clothes are beginning to appear a wrinkle here and a crease there. And in their perfectly groomed hair are beginning to appear a stray hair here and a stray hair there.

If only the indiscreet passenger would keep to himself, would not be so much there, so much present to them. But, to be honest, he neither directly nor, undoubtedly, intentionally harasses them, nor is he now noisy, as he was a couple of hours ago. The elite passengers dislike noises, particularly any if only remotely similar to those workmen on their estates make, such as, among so many others, their groaning and panting when carrying or pushing loads of some gross material or other. Then there are the sweat stains at their necks, down the centre of their backs and beneath their arms–not to mention the horrible odor. What with all of which, the elite passengers, as with all the members of the elite, to avoid the sight of workmen and their utter vulgarity, to avoid the

very thought of them and their utter vulgarity, always ensure that they are away from their estates when major construction or renovation is being done.

If only he would have continued to be only as indiscreet as he was the first couple of hours of the flight, they might have been able to ignore him–that is, if only they were able to keep out of their minds his unbelievably tacky, high-priced, brand-new suit he is surely wearing for the first time. But being of the, what amounts to in the present age, aristocracy, they must not show in a direct manner that they are bothered by him, and anything they might say about him to his wife–who, they think, might have been a maid in the bourgeois house of some common professional, such a physician or judge–must be said only obliquely and in a way in which it would seem that they were not saying anything at all about him. Then she herself, if she somehow or other managed to catch on, might think to speak to one of the stewardesses about finding a place for her husband in the economy section.

The only thing the elite passengers can do is to try to pretend that the indiscreet passenger is not there in the rear, in the aisle seat of the first set of seats at the door of the first-class section, or to try to forget that he is there with the help of cocktails. But there is one good thing about him now, as opposed to some hours ago, that he is being, to say the least, very quiet. Then again, his very silence is like a nonstop raucous cry of his presence in the ears of each and every one of them–if only they could in some way and to wherever, anywhere beyond their sight for a start, have him removed from the first-class section.

The elite passengers are becoming still more unlike themselves. Though each and every one of them is slim and of elegant figure, they are feeling still more weighted and uncomfortable in their seats, sitting still less collected and upright, less correct, slouching still more. In their perfectly tailored and tasteful clothes appear still more wrinkles and creases. In their perfectly groomed hair appear still more stray hairs. And the women's perfectly applied cosmetics are beginning to smear.

The elite passengers consume more and more drinks. And the rate of their consumption of drinks increases every minute more they pass, are forced to pass in the presence of the indiscreet passenger George Brown.

And the elite passengers are feeling rather warm, notwithstanding the cool temperature of the first-class section. It must be, they feel, the drinks they consume at such a high rate, and with being well beyond the one drink or at most the two drinks they would normally consume on the flight from London to New York.

III

Working their farm, an immense complex in the most fertile region of the country, George and Martha Brown have made a good life, raising their children without any too serious problems occurring, sending them to school and seeing several of them married, and amassed a fair fortune. But, to the elite, as to the elite

passengers in the first-class section of the airplane, they still are and will always be menial inferiors.

George Brown's tacky, high-priced, brand-new suit, picked out by himself–contrarily, his wife Martha, when with him in the city shopping, always managing to have him buy, be it a suit or simply a tie or a handkerchief, something low-toned, if not always less expensive–donned for the first time for the airplane trip, particularly pains the sensitivities of the elite passengers. Could he not have thought to wear it some beforehand at least? And, besides being simply tacky, its color and cloth are all wrong for the season and its cut for the occasion, a mere airplane trip from London to New York. A few of the elite passengers noticed it even prior to boarding and assumed that he was some passenger destined for the regular if not economy section who splurged several months' wages on an expensive suit. These few elite passengers were even more shocked than their peers, but of course not having given any signs to the fact, when they, stepping through the doorway into the first-class section, saw him sitting in the first set of seats, in the aisle seat and his wife the window, pointing out things to her with a haphazard manner and speaking to her exictedly, quite without restraint, apparently impressed by the opulence of the first-class section. They were so shocked that they were even unable to look at him without him noticing, he interrupting his vulgar behavior and apparently endeavoring–with what unbelievable nerve–to make eye contact with them.

George Brown is now being, with all his extreme indiscreetness, an unbelievable bother to the elite passengers. So that several of

them now speak about him to some of the stewardesses, though in an oblique and reserved manner. With their training and the aversion to being disconcerted, being caught out instilled by it, and, beneath it, the mechanisms to avoid being caught out, none of the elite passengers ventures to speak about him to any of the stewardesses directly and frankly. If they were to, it would itself be an infraction against their training and an admission that they were disconcerted, were caught out, and in fact would itself be a very act of being disconcerted, being caught out. One of the stewardesses, mirroring their oblique and reserved manner, tells a couple of them that she is sorry for the inconvenience and also that she and her colleagues themselves are, to say the least, discomfited by him. An elite passenger replies to her that it should be arranged for him to be moved out of the first-class section to the very rear of the airplane and the economy. Then another across the aisle, being quite inebriated, as all his peers, both men and women, are on the verge of becoming, says to her in a loud voice, fairly slurring his words, that the cargo-room would be a more appropriate place for such an indiscreet passenger.

Notwithstanding the spaciousness of the first-class section, the elite passengers are feeling more and more cramped and suffocated by George Brown's presence with them; it is becoming more and more as if he were in the very laps and arms of each and every one of them. To lessen such feelings of crampedness and suffocation, in an endeavor to regain some of the space between themselves and him his presence itself has filled, they with hands beginning to shake and lips to tremble drink cocktail after cocktail.

The elite passengers are extremely disconcerted. Their unfathomable riches, their unfathomable wealth garnered of generations is unable either to seclude them from or even to cushion their sensitivities against the indiscreet, the extremely indiscreet passenger George Brown. But except for the brief exchanges several of them had with some of the stewardesses and through them with each other, among themselves they do not even allude to him, much less speak about him; they are pretending, each one of them to himself or herself, without speaking a single if only allusive word or sending a single if only allusive look to one another–not daring to do so in fear of exposing to one another their precarious pretence for what it is and consequently losing its support–that their unfathomable wealth and the continuous stream of cocktails they are consuming somehow or other make untrue the fact of the indiscreet passenger's presence, the indiscreet passenger's presence growing more and more, quite every second, and consequently becoming, for them, more and more insufferable.

The elite passengers are very much aware of George Brown, very much aware that, they cannot deny, he is a fellow passenger of theirs and they fellow passengers of his in the first-class section of the airplane on its journey to New York; he is simply and so very much there in the aisle seat at the door of the first-class section. Where they must, against their wills, pass by him on their way to the restroom, being, though private and for their own use only, a short way down the corridor from the door of the first-class section proper. Worse still, they must use the restroom much more

than usual because of their continuous consumption of drinks and their extreme nervousness, their extreme very anxiety caused by the indiscreet passenger himself–and what with a fair part of the journey over the Atlantic to New York still to go, to them, a distance quite without end.

The elite passengers are unable to regain at all their reserve, their coolness and aloofness, much less to the degree of totally secluding themselves from the indiscreet passenger. If only they could have him removed from the airplane altogether, or, if not that, if only they themselves could leave the airplane altogether. It is impossible of course, consequently they are stuck with him on the airplane and in their very own section, the first-class. They cannot, even with all their unfathomable wealth and the power intrinsic to it, the power it in fact is, order the pilot to land somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic and let them disembark, if only into the ocean itself, and escape from him, the indiscreet passenger George Brown, lumpy, misshapen, poorly groomed, blunt-featured, sun-burnt in his tacky, high-priced, brand-new suit slouching there, dreadfully slouching there, right there behind them in the aisle seat at the door of the first-class section, if not continuously right in the very laps and arms of each and every one of them while they, beneath the extreme anxiety of his quite ubiquitous undeniable presence, with severely shaking hands and severely trembling lips drink cocktail after cocktail after cocktail, tossing them off with an utterly unrestrained manner and loud gurling sounds.

And the elite passengers are feeling very hot, many of them sweating, notwithstanding the cool temperature of the first-class section. It must be, they pretend, the drinks they are consuming at such an extraordinary rate, and with being quite immeasurably beyond the one drink or at most the two drinks they would normally consume on the flight from London to New York.

IV

Though a good decent man, with his heart in the right place, Martha Brown's husband George has always had the tendency to behave showily before the elite. It is the reason why he did not listen to her about his suit, that it might be a bit too much for the occasion of the airplane trip and, if he insisted on wearing it for it, that, being brand-new, he should wear it on a few evenings-out in the city. But with all the work on the farm–though for years now only administering it and, whenever needed, filling in, running the tractors and other machinery, and leaving the real labor to the hired hands–he, if he had thought to do as she advised, might not have found time to wear it and go to the city for any evenings-out at all, particularly as he was working more than usual so as to get things done prior to the month hiatus from the farm their time in New York was planned to be. A month's hiatus, a month's leisure to gather up their forces in preparation for the new venture, the largest and most ambitious and risky of their lives, he convinced

her to consent to against her better judgement, what with their approaching the age when others begin thinking about retiring.

George has always wanted to draw the attention of the elite to himself, wanted to be looked at by them, and to be recognized, acknowledged by them, not as one of their peers, but as a man who has done well by himself. He has never realized that, to the elite, it is not only a matter of wealth, but, notwithstanding all the ideas about equality in the present age, also and even primarily one of blood, of the fact that he or any other upstart is not of any of the great ancestral commercial houses.

Regardless, Martha Brown knows that the elite have over the years of course noticed her husband George, and come to learn something of his very substantial ventures in farming. But he himself has never known that they have. And, to make it worse, he himself felt, she always saw, on any of the occasions he has tried to be noticed by the elite, at the least with some slight sign of respect, that he, for all intents and purposes, did not even exist for them, she seeing, with a throb of pain for her good decent man, the crest-fallen look on his face, if only, and in fact usually, a quickly passing shadow of one. All over some foolish need of his to be recognized, acknowledged, and by those she herself, on the whole, does not think very highly of, mostly for their pretension of acting as if they were not, in the end, as everyone else, simply human–neither rich nor poor, great nor lowly, famous nor obscure but simply human.

But now the elite, beyond any doubt, notice him, at least those of them do who are, whether they like it or not, his fellow

passengers here in the first-class section of the airplane flying over the Atlantic to New York. None of the elite passengers, she knows, will say anything about him to her, nor will any of the stewardesses. Except for the few furtive whispered comments the head stewardess of the flight and some officer or other from the pilot's cabin made within her hearing on the spur of the moment when it happened, that they wondered whether he could not be moved out of the first-class section to somewhere else–having implied, at least to her own feeling, that they did not want the elite passengers to be indisposed by him–no one has said anything to her about him being a bother, or any some such thing, not even the stewardess who a short while ago, from simple consideration, asked her whether she might not want her breakfast. But of course no one would–are they not all, without exception, human, simply human?

With all their perfect reserve and aloofness now gone and replaced by their extreme anxiety, unable to be either hidden or calmed by their nonstop drinking–the first-class section smelling like some low grogshop–and all their perfectly tailored and tasteful clothes now extremely creased and wrinkled and even stained with spilt drinks and, each and every one of them profusely perspiring, sweat at their necks, down the centre of their backs and beneath their arms, and all their perfect grace and subtlety now gone with them not merely dreadfully slouching in their seats but many sprawling in them without restraint, and all their perfect grooming now extremely disheveled, and the women's perfectly applied cosmetics extremely smeared, she can

see that her George is very present to the elite passengers, that in fact he is now, and has been for some hours, notwithstanding that they did not show it to the degree they do now, the most present and most important, most significant presence in their lives. It is too bad that something similar, if only to a lesser degree, and of course under completely different circumstances, never occurred in the past with the elite; George could have enjoyed it and believed that the elite at the least respected him for at least having made a not so very little something of himself, and what with having been born the son of a day-laborer and a washer-woman in a rural town.

And no one, not any of the stewardesses, nor the officer who attended to her husband George and spoke a few words to her, attempting to comfort her, nor any of the elite passengers themselves–mostly likely, to retain a finest sliver of appearance that they are as cool and aloof as ever–has asked her to cover him again with the blanket she removed soon after she was left alone with him. Neither has anyone asked her, if only hintingly, whether they might not move him into her seat by the window. But even if someone were to, she would not consent to having him moved into the window seat; he himself offered it to her, knowing how she has always enjoyed one, whether in a bus or a train or, as now, an airplane. He was always doing things like that for her, looking to satisfy her trifling everyday sentiments–the good decent man he was. Let the elite, at least those of them who are his fellow passengers here in the first-class section, for once notice and show that they notice her George.

If it were not that she does not possess the slightest wish to speak to anyone, she might even have thought to complain about the ruckus the elite passengers are making, yelling gibberish to one another, jumping in and out of their seats and climbing over them, and howling with laughter, hysterical laughter. Anyway, there is only a bit less than an hour till the airplane lands in New York.

Though it is a grievous offence against all common decency, she can for a short time more put up with the ruckus the elite passengers are making. And as for her husband George, the good decent man he always was, if not too seldom clumsy socially, he, if he were...

Baby in the Stroller

I

In the kitchen of her apartment, Judy Hill, wearing a frowsy dress and grubby house-slippers, her hair straggly and her makeup slapdash, looks in the bread-bin and sees that it is empty. Just as she thought, so she must go out and buy a loaf or two at the bakery.

But it is really no big deal; the bakery is only two blocks away, a mere five-minute walk–when she goes alone, but with Baby in the

stroller she has to be very careful of the traffic and so it takes nearly ten minutes, sometimes even nearly twenty minutes, sometimes even nearly half an hour, sometimes even nearly an hour, sometimes even nearly so long she does not know how long. And, unluckily, today when she goes out for bread, she must take Baby in the stroller; Mrs Weatherby is on a visit to her son these days and so is not around to watch Baby.

Maybe she should also buy milk for Baby. She herself used to drink milk, but stopped when Baby was born–or more recently, some short time after he turned two months old? Anyhow, she better make sure about the milk. Judy steps over to the refrigerator and opens it, looks to the inside of the door and sees five full bottles of milk. So she does not need to buy milk for Baby at the bakery–one less thing to worry about.

Judy cocks an ear and hears only the distant sounds of the city traffic down in the streets. Good, as usual in the morning and also throughout the whole day, Baby is being very quiet, mostly sleeping and only rarely waking and crying for her and his milk. By the way, what time can it be? Judy looks up at a clock on the wall above the refrigerator and sees that it is nearly noon. It is really not a good time to be going out with Baby in the stroller to get bread; there is too much car and taxi, unluckily, mostly taxi traffic of people from offices throughout the city coming to the popular delicatessens in the neighborhood for lunch.

But it is really no big deal if she does what she must remember to remember to do, to be very careful of the traffic at the second street from the building of her apartment. The first is only a sort

of small side-street with barely any traffic at all–nevertheless, she must remember to remember to be very careful there also when she crosses with Baby in the stroller.

Judy walks out of the kitchen, goes down the hall and turns into the bathroom. She looks in the mirror and sees that her hair is straggly and her makeup slapdash. Of course it is herself, what she always sees in the mirror, herself–at least when Mrs Weatherby is not around to help her with her hair and makeup, help her with herself, help her look different from herself.

Judy turns away from the reflection of herself in the mirror, walks out of the bathroom and goes across the hall into Baby's room and to his crib, then rapidly looks down at it and up from it, rapidly looks down at it and up from it, rapidly looks down at it and up from it. She turns away from Baby's crib and goes to a bent-up stroller in a corner. She takes hold of the handles and pushing it darts out of Baby's room and down the hall and out into the livingroom and through it into the entryway, then abruptly stops a few steps from the door.

Judy notices that the bent-up stroller is bent-up and remembers that it is bent-up and that she should buy a new stroller, or at least have this one fixed, particularly the front wheels, being fairly turned inwards, making it at times somewhat hard for her to push it with Baby in it. She makes to take hold of the handles of the bent-up stroller and remembers that there is something she should be remembering, then abruptly pulls her hands back and becomes utterly rigid, staring, her eyes wide-open and blank-looking, at the bent-up stroller.

There is something she is forgetting to remember and should be remembering to remember. What is it? There is something she is forgetting to remember and should be remembering to remember. What is it? There is something she is forgetting to remember and should be remembering to remember. What is it? To fix the bent-up stroller? No, she just remembered to remember that, and even now is remembering to remember that. Anyhow, she can manage with the bent-up stroller; though at times difficult by his waking in the night and crying for her and his milk, and, more rarely, even more difficult by his voice in the very walls, all of them, no matter where she tries to escape to, waking in the night and crying for her and his milk, Baby is only a wee little thing and so it is usually easy to push him in the bent-up stroller, even with it sort of bent-up, particularly the front wheels. But what she will do is buy a new stroller when Baby outgrows this one.

In the entryway a few steps from the door, Judy remains standing utterly rigid and staring, her eyes wide-open and blank-looking, at the bent-up stroller. There is something she is forgetting and should be remembering–money of course; she better remember to remember to take money when she goes to the bakery. Sometimes she forgets to remember to remember to take money and goes to the bakery without money–but what else is she forgetting? The traffic of course; she better remember to remember to be sure to be very careful of the traffic, particularly at the second street from the building of her apartment. But after she crosses it with Baby in the stroller, she for a few minutes need not remember, need not worry to remember to remember to be very

careful of the traffic; she then only needs to walk on the sidewalk to the bakery, the fourth shop down from the corner of the dangerous street–luckily, cars and taxis usually keep off the sidewalks.

Anyway, it really would have been much better, much safer to have left Baby here in her apartment rather than have taken him along in the stroller. But Matt was at work–Matt? No, Mrs Weatherby is these days gone on a visit to her son and, if she remembers right, will not be returning till a day after tomorrow, Sunday, sometime in the evening. And there is no one else to leave Baby with.

What about her mother? But these days she has phoned her mother again and again and she does not answer, even when she lets it ring a hundred times, a couple of days ago, if she did not make a mistake counting, even a thousand times–but of course her mother did not answer because, if she thinks about it, she died last year.

In the entryway a few steps from the door, Judy remains standing utterly rigid and staring, her eyes wide-open and blank-looking, at the bent-up stroller. During moments like these she wishes she and Matt were married, or at least still living together, so he could help with Baby. Or maybe it is better that they are not married or even still living together; when they see each other, they seem always to fight. He always starts the fights; he is always so critical, always criticizing her–about Baby. Baby? Why about Baby? What about Baby? What about Baby is it that he says to her? No, no, she cannot, absolutely cannot, no, no matter what they tell

her or do to her, absolutely cannot, cannot remember what about Baby–her care of him? But was she ever slack in her duties as a mother? Did she not feed him his milk, keep him clean, play with him? And she loved more than anything else to play with him; he was always making her both laugh and cry with his wee little hands grasping her fingers and nose and pulling at her lips and ears or simply touching her face, loved him with his wee little hands touching her face...

Her and Matt's biggest fight was about the bent-up stroller. He yelled at her and in the end even knocked her around. And just because she asked him to fix it. But she must admit that she asked him to fix it nonstop, and, to say the least, insistently. At times she even begged him to fix it–and screamed and screamed at him to fix it. It was probably what got him angry enough to knock her around, something he never once did in the past. And she must admit that she was the one who somehow or other got the stroller into the bent-up shape it is in now. She is pretty sure that she did it on one of those occasions she had trouble opening it or closing it, one or the other, and lost patience and became frustrated and so did it any old way, forced it open or closed, one or the other, any old way. Nowadays she is much more careful with the stroller than she used to be–of course particularly when out on the streets with Baby in it. It is what she always tells Matt and always says in the messages she leaves on his answering-machine–so can he not come back and fix the bent-up stroller? Make it right? Make everything right? Please, please, make everything just as it was before she got the stroller into the bent-up shape it is in now?

In the entryway a few steps from the door, Judy remains standing utterly rigid and staring, her eyes wide-open and blank-looking, at the bent-up stroller. She always thought that Matt was a good worker, not lazy at all, and so she cannot really understand at all why he did not fix the bent-up stroller, why he refused to fix it–and her having even begged him to fix it. Anyhow, being nearly twenty-five and knowing better, she now realizes that her mother was right that they were both too young to get seriously involved, she having been barely eighteen and he only a bit over twenty–then soon afterward she having got pregnant with Baby and all.

Her mother was just the opposite about Baby; her mother was always telling her that she was a very good mother–one reason why she has been trying to get through to her on the phone these days, to hear her on the phone telling her that she was a very good mother–and what with being a single mother, and so telling her not to be always worrying over Baby. Her mother even said that she should start to go out on dates with other men, what with her relationship with Matt being pretty much finished. It started to go bad some couple months after Baby was born, if she remembers right, some few days after he turned two months old–so must have been very recently.

To go out on dates with other men, she would have to leave Baby with someone. Mrs Weatherby is dependable and very kind to her and of course also to Baby himself, but she does not want to impose on her more than she absolutely needs to. Mrs Weatherby has not had a too easy life herself. Years ago she even lost her eldest son from cancer when he was only ten. Poor woman, she

can imagine how she feels–what if, once he grew up to be only ten, she were to lose Baby from cancer?!

There is her mother of course–what is she thinking? her mother?–but she would have to come live with her here in the city. She herself would not go, under no circumstances would go live with her in the country, as her mother repeatedly asked her to do. Once her mother even tried to trick her into returning with her to the country. She will never forget how when she was out somewhere or other–if she remembers right, her mother herself having asked her to go down and pick something up for her–and then came back she caught her in Baby's room without her permission, and even against her express wishes, with his little clothes out and packing them in a couple of boxes–she put a stop to that straightaway!

Anyhow, in a few years Baby would have been going to nursery school and she would have then had some free time, whether to go out on dates with other men or for anything else. Maybe she would have been able to find a job even, which would have become more necessary the older Baby got and his material needs increased.

In the entryway, Judy Hill, wearing the frowsy dress and the grubby house-slippers, her hair straggly and her makeup slapdash, steps to the door and opens it, then steps back, takes hold of the handles of the bent-up stroller and pushing it leaves her apartment.

II

Just down from the building of her apartment, Judy Hill pushing the bent-up stroller runs into the porter Steve, a husky bearded man of around thirty.

'Good-day Miss Hill' Steve greets her, smiling behind his beard.

'Same–good-day' she says softly, then pushing the bent-up stroller moves on.

Steve watches Judy, wearing the frowsy dress and the grubby house-slippers, her hair straggly and her makeup slapdash, pushing the bent-up stroller go down the sidewalk. She is with that stroller and so having one of her bad days, as often when left alone too long. Judy is, beyond doubt, even getting worse with time and so needs special help. If only her mother were still alive. Anyhow, he hopes that Mrs Weatherby will, as planned, return on Sunday.

Judy pushing the bent-up stroller nears the first street down from the building of her apartment. Steve asked her out for coffee one time. She refused, telling him that she had no one to leave Baby with. But being a nice guy, he probably would not have minded if she had accepted his offer on the condition that she bring Baby with them. If he ever asks her out for coffee again, maybe she will accept with that condition. But he probably will not ask her out for coffee again; the first and only time he asked her out for coffee having been ages ago now, if she remembers right, some short time after Baby turned two months old, and not having done so again by now, he never will–or he might very well

ask her out for coffee again because Baby turned two months old only very recently, in fact only a few days ago and so the first and only time he asked her out for coffee was only a few days ago.

Judy pushing the bent-up stroller reaches the first street she must cross. Here there is only a stop-sign, being only a sort of side-street, and, at that, only a one-way street. She looks both ways and sees no cars or taxis coming, looks both ways and sees no cars or taxis coming, looks both ways and sees no cars or taxis coming, then holds in her breath and pushing the bent-up stroller dashes across the street, reaches the corner and lets out her breath–how nice to be out on the streets with Baby in the stroller!

Judy pushing the bent-up stroller moves on from the corner a short way, then as she sees a group of schoolchildren coming toward her abruptly stops and closes her eyes. Not them again. She should have managed to get out much earlier than noon or much later than noon, in any case, not at noon with the kids going home for lunch–and without all the car and taxi, unluckily, mostly taxi traffic of people from offices throughout the city coming to the popular delicatessens in the neighborhood for lunch.

'Crazy Judy! Crazy Judy!' the kids chorus, coming up to her with the bent-up stroller, wearing the frowsy dress and the grubby house-slippers, her hair straggly and her makeup slapdash, and with her eyes closed.

'Hey! How're you doing Judy sweetheart?!'

'Just back from the hairdresser?!' and the kids burst into laughter.

'How's Ba–'

'–Shut-up Rick' interrupts one of the girls and the kids burst into laughter, then pass on. After several moments Judy opens her eyes and takes a look around. Good, those terrible schoolchildren are gone. She pushing the bent-up stroller moves on.

Judy pushing the bent-up stroller reaches the second street she must cross. Here there is always traffic, being an intersecting two-way street. Luckily, there is a stop-light and so a crossing-light for pedestrians. But, if she thinks about it, it really does not make much difference; cars and taxis, particularly taxis have been known to go through red lights. Just the other day there was that case of a taxi going through a red light she heard about. When was that case of a taxi going through a red light she heard about? What? Just the other day was that case of a taxi going through a red light she heard about? And even read about in all those old newspapers hidden under the mattress of her bed? But what is the date of all those old newspapers hidden under the mattress of her bed? What? Some few days after Baby turned two months old?

Judy notices that the crossing-light is green. She looks both ways and sees no cars or taxis coming, looks both ways and sees no cars or taxis coming, looks both ways and sees no cars or taxis coming– no, she will not cross the street just yet. She must be very careful, very suspicious of the crossing-light, of it tricking her into crossing the street at the wrong time; she is a mother and responsible for the welfare of her child, the welfare of Baby. Judy sees the crossing-light turn red and after a couple of moments cars and taxis, unluckily, as always, mostly taxis pass in front of her from both directions.

When the crossing-light turns green, she must be sure to remember to remember first to look both ways three times and to try to do so at the right speed and without faltering, not even by a dot, just as she did at the first street–yes, she is sure that she crossed it exactly as she is supposed to. Judy sees the crossing-light turn green. She looks both ways and sees cars and taxis in both directions stopped at the stop-light, looks both ways and sees cars and taxis in both directions stopped at the stop-light, looks both ways and sees cars and taxis in both directions stopped at the stop-light, then holds in her breath and pushing the bent-up stroller dashes across the street, reaches the corner and lets out her breath–how nice to be out on the streets with Baby in the stroller!

Judy remains standing with the bent-up stroller on the corner, wearing the frowsy dress and the grubby house-slippers, her hair straggly and her makeup slapdash, people passing around her, occasionally one of them pausing to look at her closely for a moment before moving on. She looks down at the bent-up stroller and notices that it is bent-up. At the very least, she better have the front wheels fixed; just now when she crossed the street to the corner here, she felt them stick and so had to scud the stroller part of the way. The bent-up stroller could stick completely and so she with it and Baby in it could get stuck right in the middle of the street with the stopped cars and taxis, particularly taxis waiting for the light to turn green to speed off completely heedless of her and, much more importantly, Baby himself, only an infant a few days past two months old...he is always making her both laugh and cry with his wee little hands grasping her fingers and nose

and pulling at her lips and ears or simply touching her face, loves him with his wee little hands touching her face...

She should have a look at him just to make sure that he is all right. Judy steps in front of the bent-up stroller and rapidly looks down at it and up from it, rapidly looks down at it and up from it, rapidly looks down at it and up from it. Good, all is fine with Baby–as far as she can make out in her confusion. Unluckily, as often when on the streets with Baby in the stroller, she is somewhat confused and worried, confused with her worry, her anxiety about crossing the streets with Baby in the stroller.

Her mother was probably right that she should start to see Dr Lucas again. She must admit that he even began to help her to worry less about Baby and going out with him in the stroller and crossing the streets. But then he started to say mean things about Baby. Her last session was on that day he actually said the meanest thing about Baby and she cut him off and had a fit before he said, could have said–as if Baby were to blame for her own problems, only an infant a few days past two months old...he is always making her both laugh and cry with his wee little hands grasping her fingers and nose and pulling at her lips and ears or simply touching her face, loves him with his wee little hands touching her face...

Judy remains standing with the bent-up stroller on the corner, wearing the frowsy dress and the grubby house-slippers, her hair straggly and her makeup slapdash, people passing around her, occasionally one of them pausing to look at her closely for a moment before moving on. She looks down at the bent-up stroller

and notices that it is bent-up. As her mother said, Dr Lucas meant well and was only trying to help her. She knows that she needs help–at least needed help then. Then? When? Needed help when? What, soon after Baby was born?

Anyhow, she knows that she still needs help with her anxiety–should probably start to take sedatives again. It seems even to be getting worse with time; when out with Baby in the stroller and crossing the two streets to the bakery, or, worse still, the six to the nearest supermarket and half of them intersecting two-way streets, she nowadays not too seldom hears the sudden violent screeching of tires a hairbreadth away–with Baby in the stroller! But then, luckily, after some moments she always realizes that it was just the sound from some car, or, much more likely, some taxi somewhere else, on some other street. Nevertheless, she always becomes, to say the least, afraid and confused–should probably start to take sedatives again. So she better go to Dr Lucas for a prescription–or maybe better not; she does not know whether they might not try to keep her there in one of the rooms of the hospital where he has his office, as they tried to do that time she went to see him with her mother and, if she remembers right, also Matt. If she remembers right, it was a few days after Baby turned two months old–so recently? No, she must be completely mistaken–which is understandable, what with her in some confusion with her anxiety about being on the streets with Baby in the stroller.

Judy remains standing with the bent-up stroller on the corner, wearing the frowsy dress and the grubby house-slippers, her hair straggly and her makeup slapdash, people passing around her,

occasionally one of them pausing to look at her closely for a moment before moving on. She looks down at the bent-up stroller and notices that it is bent-up. There is the trip back to her apartment. But though feeling much more anxiety than usual, she is somewhat comforted with the thought that she and Baby in the stroller are only two street-crossings away from the building of her apartment.

She is feeling unwell today because she slept badly last night; Baby himself was unsettled, countless times waking up and crying for her and his milk, and in the end his voice in the very walls, all of them, no matter where she tried to escape to and her hands over her ears or not, crying, screaming, wailing for her and his milk. No matter how hard she tried, no matter her repeated presence in his room at his crib and the bottles of milk she poured in his crib and splashed on the walls, it was impossible to get him to sleep without him soon again waking and crying for her and his milk.

Judy Hill pushing the bent-up stroller moves on from the corner, reaches the bakery a few shops down and goes inside.

III

Judy, very much shaken, pushing the bent-up stroller reaches the building of her apartment–that second street! The first street back from the bakery, the more dangerous and difficult, she crossed with the baker's helper Mike, who told her that he was just out on an errand, and so she was relaxed and forgetful when she crossed

the second–how did she ever cross it?! After she somehow or other crossed it, as she heard–what a great fright!–the sudden violent screeching of tires a hairbreadth away she realized that she did not look at all, much less was careful, much less crossed it exactly in the manner she is supposed to–with Baby in the stroller with her! But because she and Baby in the stroller are here in front of the building of her apartment, yes, she is very sure that she and Baby in the stroller are here in front of the building of her apartment, or at least as sure as she can be without asking some passer-by, or, to be even more sure, several passers-by whether she and Baby in the stroller are here in front of the building of her apartment, there was no car, or, much worse, much more dangerous, no taxi, no, no taxi–to run over Baby in the stroller!

She better go back and cross the street exactly in the manner she is supposed to, then turn round and cross it again exactly in the manner she is supposed to, just to be sure, to make sure that the sudden violent screeching of tires a hairbreadth away did not have anything to do with her and Baby in the stroller. Judy pushing the bent-up stroller turns round and goes back to the small one-way street a short distance down from the building of her apartment. She looks both ways and sees no cars or taxis coming, looks both ways and sees no cars or taxis coming, looks both ways and sees no cars or taxis coming, then holds in her breath and pushing the bent-up stroller dashes across the street, reaches the corner and lets out her breath–how nice to be out on the streets with Baby in the stroller!

But, unluckily, she must immediately cross the street again. She must be sure to remember to remember first to look both ways three times and to try to do so at the right speed and without faltering, not even by a dot, just as she is sure that she did a moment ago though without thinking about it–yes, she is sure that she crossed the street exactly as she is supposed to. Judy looks both ways and sees no cars or taxis coming, looks both ways and sees no cars or taxis coming, looks both ways and sees no cars or taxis coming, then holds in her breath and pushing the bent-up stroller dashes across the street, reaches the corner and lets out her breath–how nice to be out on the streets with Baby in the stroller!

Judy pushing the bent-up stroller moves on from the corner, reaches the building of her apartment a short way down and goes inside.

'That was quick Miss Hill' says the porter Steve at his desk in the lobby, smiling behind his beard.

'Only went to the bakery' she says softly.

'Missus Weatherby was just here and asked about you.'

'Missus Weatherby?' softly.

'Yes, she changed her plans. I'm sure she'll look in on you as soon as she hears you come in.'

'Very kind woman–Missus Weatherby' softly.

'The best–she has a heart of gold.'

Judy, without a word more, pushing the bent-up stroller moves away toward the elevator, then abruptly stops a short distance from both it and Steve at his desk. He, knowing her and her

behavior very well after these several years, and not wanting to risk upsetting her, says nothing.

She is glad that Mrs Weatherby has returned; Mrs Weatherby always manages somehow to keep her mind off her worry, her anxiety about Baby. And, much more importantly, she is very good with Baby himself, in fact so good that when with her in her apartment, and even if at night, he in his room in his crib never wakes and cries for her and his milk.

Tomorrow she will have Mrs Weatherby over to watch Baby, so that she can go to the supermarket–seems to be out of everything. Mrs Weatherby will not mind; as Steve said, she has a heart of gold. And even if Mrs Weatherby has work to do in her own apartment, she can watch Baby there.

That way she can also concentrate on Sunday and going with Baby in the stroller to the park. To get there, she must cross many streets, but will somehow manage. It is always very nice to be with Baby in the stroller outdoors at the park; when outdoors at the park, Baby in the stroller never wakes and cries for her and his milk.

Judy remains standing with the bent-up stroller a short distance from both the elevator and Steve at his desk. She hopes that she can get some sleep tomorrow night, to be all rested for Sunday morning and the many street-crossings to the park with Baby in the stroller, and so hopes that Baby himself will have a good night tomorrow night, hopes that he will not wake and cry for her and his milk.

For that matter, she hopes that Baby will be fine tonight–and very much hopes that he will not be like last night. But if he is and again and again wakes and cries for her and his milk, his voice in the very walls, all of them, no matter where she tries to escape to and her hands over her ears or not, cries, screams, wails for her and his milk, she will just sleep in tomorrow morning and go to the supermarket anytime she can manage.

She better remember to remember to buy milk for Baby, even though there are those five full bottles in the refrigerator–and have they maybe expired again? She better check. Anyhow, what she should do is write down everything she needs, have a list for the supermarket tomorrow. She will when she gets to her apartment–of course after she first tidies and feeds Baby and puts him to sleep. And if Mrs Weatherby does drop in, she will ask her to help her with everything; she seems not too seldom to be forgetting to remember things she should be remembering to remember.

Judy Hill, wearing the frowsy dress and the grubby house-slippers, her hair straggly and her makeup slapdash, pushing the bent-up stroller goes to the elevator and steps inside before the door closes.

After a short time Steve reaches under his desk and picks up the receiver of the in-building phone. He presses a couple of the buttons, puts it to his ear and says 'Hello Missus Weatherby. Did you hear Judy come in?' Then a moment or two later 'Just on your way over to her place? All right Missus Weatherby. But please let me know how things go.'

Recognition in the Light of Morning

I

William looks drowsily through half-closed eyes a turn around the waiting-room in the low fuzzy lighting...*I am the only one in the waiting-room. Am I so special? such an exception? Am I the only one with a dying old father? the only one waiting for an old father to die?*...sees drowsily through half-closed eyes he is the only one in the waiting-room with the low fuzzy lighting, the neither comfortable nor uncomfortable chairs making him wish neither to linger nor to hasten away, whether to the white room and his dying old father or out of the hospital into the night, and the same insipid magazines read by him night upon night.

Will his father, at the end of the long and straight silver-gleamy corridor in the white room and the night-time darkness, recognize William before morning? If ever, it must be before morning, before morning in the night-time darkness; Dr Franck told William today that his father will not make it till morning–just as he has told him for several days now that he would not make it till morning. But, no, this is it, his last night before morning, before the light of morning. His last night before the light of morning and confined

in the white room and the night-time darkness, lying slack-bodied with wide-open eyes in the metal-frame bed with the firm mattress beneath the crisp sheet.

William occasionally goes down the long and straight silver-gleamy corridor to the white room at the end and keeps a watch over his father in the night-time darkness, prevented by the metal-frame bed with the firm mattress from falling into the night-time darkness and being utterly engulfed by the night-time darkness, and himself sitting in the chair in the corner in the rosy light of the lamp with the rose-colored shade the mere few steps away. Even with him sitting there in the corner illuminated by the rosy light the mere few steps away from him, his father's wide-open eyes are staring into nothing, and seeing nothing, and recognizing nothing, no, not even William himself in the rosy light the mere few steps away.

Is it not better this way? Better no sense and no recognition of self, no sense and no recognition of others, no recognition of place and no, no recognition of time and so better, very much better no, no recognition of time's final and ultimate gift death? When William's father throbs his last physical throb, no person will die; William's father has already died, is now dead lying slack-bodied with wide-open eyes in the metal-frame bed with the firm mattress beneath the crisp sheet, confined in it and confined in the night-time darkness of the white room.

Sitting alone in the waiting-room with the low fuzzy lighting, the neither comfortable nor uncomfortable chairs making him wish neither to linger nor to hasten away, whether to the white

room and his dying old father or out of the hospital into the night, and the same insipid magazines read by him night upon night, William looks drowsily through half-closed eyes toward the long and straight silver-gleamy corridor leading to his father at the end.

Dr Franck is right that William's father will die before morning, and has been right for several days now that he would die before morning; he has died before morning, has died before several mornings now, has died before months of mornings now, since the time when the malady with all the medication ate thoroughly into his brain, his mind, ate thoroughly into his very identity and his sense of self and very recognition of self and so ate thoroughly into his sense of others and very recognition of others, even of his son and only child William himself.

William's father cannot even remember his wife, William's mother, the time of whose death was the time of the onset of the malady, the undiagnosable malady. Dr Franck has always simply said that he has an extremely weak heart and, as for his mind, that senility runs rampant–that he is simply old, old in heart, body and old, old in mind...

...Father see me!–can you not see me?!

I can see myself, see my hands rose-colored here in the corner of the night-time darkness of the white room–the night-time darkness!

I can feel my arm fleshy and the bone hard. Rise, Father, rise and feel my fleshy arm, the hard bone–can you not hear me? You are not dead–no, no Father, you are only sick, sick and old dying in the night-time darkness of the white room–the night-time darkness!

I cannot see you Father! Where are you?! Where, where have you fallen?! Why, why Father have you fallen?!

I have merely to rise in the rosy light–I cannot move! cannot see!–no! I recognize myself!

Yes, yes, I recognize myself alive here, but you Father there, there where you are..."Sir"..."Sir"...Sitting alone in the waiting-room with the low fuzzy lighting, the neither comfortable nor uncomfortable chairs making him wish neither to linger nor to hasten away, whether to the white room and his dying old father or out of the hospital into the night, and the same insipid magazines read by him night upon night, William sees drowsily through half-closed eyes Nurse Gray in her colorless uniform standing in front of him, him waiting, waiting for death to fall upon his old father and to sunder the last living cord of his slackened body and to slam shut his wide-open eyes staring into nothing, and seeing nothing, and recognizing nothing, no, recognizing nothing at all.

Nurse Gray in her colorless uniform leads William down the long and straight silver-gleamy corridor and down and down the long and straight silver-gleamy corridor to the white room at the end, not even a thinnest hint of light of any kind showing at the foot of the door.

II

In the night-time darkness of the white room, William rises from the chair beneath the lamp with the rose-colored shade in the corner and takes the mere few steps to his father lying slack-bodied and with wide-open eyes in the metal-frame bed with the

firm mattress beneath the crisp sheet. He can barely make out his father's features and so barely recognize him. If it were not that he remembers that this featureless, this amorphous mass lying limply though with a very faint residue of resiliency in the night-time darkness is his father, and with his memory of the emphasizing and reassuring evidence of his father's name first and foremost on the chart clipped to the front of the metal-frame bed seen by him in the light of morning day upon day, he would not, could not recognize his father in the night-time darkness.

William's recognition of his father is founded on an image and idea of him in memory. It is the chief reason why his father himself does not, cannot recognize William; his father, his dying old father lacks both an image and idea of him of any kind, what with his near-blind eyes and ravaged mind, the consequences of the undiagnosable malady.

The stiffly-hanging curtains of the two windows of the white room containing his father's body are, being night-time still, hidden in the night-time darkness. But William knows that the windows are there behind the metal-frame bed, one to the left and the other to the right, with the firm mattress supporting his father's limp amorphous body beneath the crisp sheet. The metal-frame bed with the firm mattress is keeping his father's limp amorphous body beneath the crisp sheet from falling into the night-time darkness and being utterly engulfed by the night-time darkness. But his father's limp amorphous body itself, though barely living, retains a resiliency similar to that of the firm mattress, if very much weaker, being a very faint residue of

resiliency. The very faint residue of resiliency of his father's limp amorphous body is that of the last residue of his life, his life without eyes and without mind, without eyes to see and without mind to recognize, recognize his son and only child William himself.

If William were merely to pull the metal-frame bed with the firm mattress from under his father's barely living body, his father would fall into the night-time darkness and be utterly engulfed by the night-time darkness. Then he would be gone, gone–and before morning, just as Dr Franck has said for several days now that he would be gone before morning, and just as he said today that he will be gone before morning.

His father will be gone, will disappear before morning, before the light of morning will reveal itself behind the stiffly-hanging curtains of the two windows behind him to either side, and, once drawn apart, reveal his father himself with his wide-open eyes staring into nothing, and seeing nothing, and recognizing nothing, nothing at all lying slack-bodied in the metal-frame bed with the firm mattress beneath the crisp sheet.

Yes, as he has told him for several days now that he would not last till morning, would be gone before morning, Dr Franck told William today that his father will not last till morning, will be gone before...*morning, before the light of morning*...

..."Sir"..."Sir"...Sitting in the chair beneath the lamp with the rose-colored shade switched-off in the corner of the white room, William sees drowsily through half-closed eyes Nurse Gray in her colorless uniform standing in front of him in the light of morning,

and drowsily through half-closed eyes the white room in the light of morning, and drowsily through half-closed eyes his father, his father completely covered by the crisp sheet the mere few steps away in the light of morning. Nurse Gray tells William that, while he was sleeping, his father passed away, surprisingly in the early morning, what with it having been thought that he could not last through the night.

William rises and takes the mere few steps to his father completely covered by the crisp sheet in the light of morning. He pulls the crisp sheet from over him, completely uncovering him in the light of morning. Yes, this is his father, his father dead, dead in the light of morning.

William pulls the crisp sheet over his father, completely covering him in the light of morning. He turns aside and notices that the chart clipped to the front of the metal-frame bed with his father's name first and foremost on it seen by him in the light of morning day upon day is gone, gone in the light of morning.